

Department of Health

Food Safety after Floods and Power Outages

Floods and other natural disasters can create food safety problems never before encountered.

When freezers and refrigerators are without power over an extended period of time, it is important to make sure that any rescued food is safe to eat. The following food safety facts will help you determine which foods are safe, and which foods should be discarded.

- Discard perishable foods like eggs, meat, fish, milk, etc. which have been above 41 degrees Fahrenheit (F) for more than four to six hours.
- The average full freezer keeps foods below 41 degrees F for two to three days without electricity. Freezers that are less than full keep the temperature below 41 degrees F for a shorter period of time.
- If food still contains ice crystals or has been kept below 41 degrees F one or two days, it can generally be refrozen. Foods that have been at or below 41 degrees F for more than several days should be inspected carefully before eating or refreezing. If the color or odor of thawed beef, pork, lamb or poultry are poor to questionable, discard the meat (in a way that no human or animal will be tempted to eat). If eaten, this food may give someone food poisoning.
- You cannot necessarily tell by the odor whether vegetables, shellfish or cooked foods have spoiled. Since bacteria multiply rapidly in these foods, do not eat any that have thawed out completely. If the freezer temperature is above 41 degrees F for more than four to six hours, the food is probably not safe to eat. Bread products are exceptions.

If you have any doubt about the quality or safety of any food, throw it out.

- Never taste food to determine if it is safe. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if it has been at room temperature longer than two hours, it can make you sick. Bacteria multiply very rapidly at room temperature.
- Once the power returns, clean your refrigerator and freezer completely including all removable parts, interior walls, gaskets and door liner, with a solution of two tablespoons baking soda to one quart warm water. Wipe down all jars, bottles and containers before returning them to the refrigerator.

If you have any questions or need additional information, call the Division of Health Protection at the 800 number below, or 802-863-7220.

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